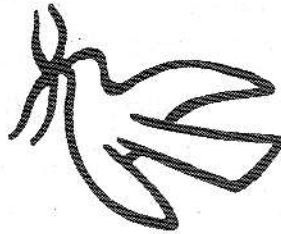


The Story of Evenadam

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Fieldwork, when it takes us any distance at all from home, from what is familiar, calls into question our own traditions of textualization, translation, and interpretation. The problems do not arise solely in the transition between the speech of others and our own inscription of that speech, but are always already there within the words of Others, in the transition between one act of speech and the quoting of that speech in a later act of speech, or in the multiple transitions between acts of narration and acts of interpretation that take place within any story.¹ The Others, when it comes to the processes by which their own discourse might be represented, edited, and expounded upon, have their own habits and notions before we get there. If this were not true, there could be no such thing as culture.

What concerns us here is the meeting, in the field and again at home, of Mayan practices in the representation and interpretation of discourse with our own. What makes this case particularly interesting is that writing, even in the strictest sense of the term, has been present in the Mayan world for better than two thousand years.² The characters of Mayan script were replaced by those of the roman alphabet in the sixteenth and seven-

teenth centuries, but the aftereffects of Mayan modes of textualization can be traced in alphabetic texts and in contemporary oral discourse.

Mayan hieroglyphic writing allowed the sowing, within the same visible field of discourse, of phonetic, iconic, and indexical signs, many of them calling for multiple interpretations. It is quite unlikely that two different reciters of the "same" hieroglyphic text, or even the same reader on two different occasions, said exactly the same thing—or at least what we mean by the same thing. Even when alphabetic writing came along, demanding a monocropping of the visible field of discourse, the sixteenth-century Quiché writers who undertook the transcription of the *Popol Vuh*, a hieroglyphic book, did not produce a glyph-by-glyph reading of the original but interwove their alphabetic version with their own explanations, speculations, and disclaimers, together with allusions to recent events (Tedlock 1983: chap. 12; 1985: 32–33, 59).

Even when moving entirely within the alphabetic field, writers among the Quiché Maya of Guatemala did not (and do not) take advantage of the editorial opportunity to make repeated discourse match its source on a word-for-word basis. When they represent a character in a narrative as quoting what another character has already said, they routinely reword and rephrase the original statement, just as Quiché weavers modify motifs rather than repeat them exactly (Tedlock and Tedlock 1985). When scripts for centuries-old dramas are recopied, newly composed speeches are inserted and old ones are altered or left out (Bode 1961: 220–26). Printed books are slowly revised with scissors and paste; they are given new covers in the form of collages, and cut-out texts from other sources are mounted with glue on their very pages.

When fieldworkers seek help in transcribing tapes of Quiché oral narratives, their informants, even when they have been instructed to repeat just what they hear from the machine, may rephrase what comes off the tape, insert lines that were not there at all, and, wherever there are words or phrases of obvious Spanish origin, replace them with Quiché ones wherever possible. Not only that, but the very people who allowed themselves to be recorded may not accept what is on a tape as an authoritative version of what they said in the first place. We seem to have entered a world where *every act of representation is also an act of interpretation*. (These days, of course, it has been dawning on a lot of us that we have been living in just such a world all along.)

In the Mayan world in general, a great value is placed on the ground from which all discourse arises and the ground to which it must return if it is to remain discourse, which is the ground of dialogue. The question of the authority of a "text" is not independent of the question as to whether and how that text might be viable in the ongoing world of dialogue, where the time and place and audience are never quite the same as on any prior occasion (Burns 1980; Tedlock 1983: chap. 10). A Mayan is unlikely to tell a story to a fieldworker in the first place unless the conversation already under way seems to suggest a particular story. Once the story is under way the fieldworker is expected to respond, even to the extent of commenting or asking questions, and thus becomes involved on both sides of the process of textualization.

A good many contemporary Mayan stories (like a good many Native North American stories) are of the kind in which Europeans or Americans see something famil-

lar looking back at them—something from the Bible, for instance. Such stories once gladdened the hearts of diffusionists, but they have always distressed researchers who imagine there is such a thing as a transparent window on a pristine past. When we approach these stories on the ground of dialogue they take on a new interest, reflecting back on us and not only on the Other.

In retelling a Mayan story here at home, it seems to me, the only proper thing to do is to frame that story within the story of how it came to be told and see where it might arrive in the process of textualization.³ But even when it comes to the story proper I will be drawn into the text, as you will see, and I will interrupt the already interpreted text in order to further interpret it.

The outlines of mounds can be traced on the peak named Thunderer, beneath the trees and in the clearing, and strewn about are slabs of gray basalt, quarried nearby, and silvery schist brought in from somewhere to the north. After the first of all dawns, when the god, the daimon known as Thunderer turned to stone, his arbor of bromeliads and hanging mosses was replaced by a temple, and a few houses were built for people who came up here on retreats.

When Thunderer first found his home here there were "masses of serpents and masses of jaguars, rattlesnakes, yellowwhites" all around, so says the *Popol Vuh*. And today people say that if you come to a place like this, to any high place that has a hearth, a gaping mouth, for offerings, and if you have touched your woman or man on that day, or quarreled or fought on that day, or if you have let your gods go thirsty and hungry too long, then a puma will show his face here, or a jaguar, a rattler, or that viper with the yellow lower jaw, the fer-de-lance. The Holy World, Holy Earth, lord of this mountain, lord of this day, they all have mouths. In the valleys below live people who know how to feed them. A Quiché man, Mateo Uz Abaj, brought us up here today, don Mateo and his youngest daughter and youngest son. Three Quichés with the three of us. Here is doña Bárbara, my wife, and I am don Dionísio, and with us is don Mal-cum, our friend. Three gringos, all three of us ethnographers—and don Mateo has shown us all how to feed these mouths.

The first person ever to come up here was a *chuckkajaw*, a motherfather. Don Mateo is a motherfather, the living bearer of the visible face of whichever motherfather may have stood at the beginning of his line of descent, long before the birth of his father's father's father, past the point where the memory of the names of the men and their wives blacks out. He knows how to speak the right words on the right days, from among all the days with thirteen numbers and twenty names, two hundred and sixty in all, the days it takes from the time a child first makes its presence known in the womb till the time it sees the light. Today is the day *Wajxaqib' Tz'ikin*, Eight Bird, the day whose secret names are *oq'etalik, sik'italik, ri pwaq, ri pwaq*, Eight Call, Eight Cry, Eight Silver, Eight Money. A good day to climb this mountain, to call, to cry out to the lord of this mountain, to ask a favor. Today also happens to be Sunday, the second Sunday in Advent, but that is not why we are here.

Now, with our tall wax candles still making an offering of light, tallow candles soaking the earth, coals of copal incense smoking the sky, rocks anointed with liquor still wet, we settle down on the rubble that rims the shrine: an old dynamite crater, blasted by treasure hunters. Looters looking for a priceless idol would never know which of the stones at the back of the hearth might be the one haunted by the daimon of the place, the stone with a gape, with lips that like to be wet with strong liquor and sometimes get a taste of hot blood from a hen with her head cut off. But don Mateo, who looks at stones with the eye of a diviner, spotted the one with the mouth the moment we got here.

We unfold the squares of brocaded cloth that wrap the part of the picnic we brought for ourselves. Every now and then don Mateo stirs the coals with a stick, making sure every last puff of incense gets free. The three ethnographers are quite content not to be doing ethnography. We've joined him in asking every imaginable god to be present here on the day Eight Bird, to accept the sustenance we've offered on the hearth, we've been sniffing the smoke of that banquet ourselves, and now we're getting high on straight shots of the same liquor the stones got dizzy on, we're taking big bites from fresh tortillas. But don Mateo has something he wants to say. A story he wants to tell. We haven't asked any questions at all today, much less a question that would give him a reason to tell a story. So he'll ask a question himself if he has to. A big question. He says, to no one in particular:

Why? Why?

And who knows what we'd remember of his answer if we hadn't had a tape recorder with us, just in case ethnography started to happen in the middle of a picnic.

Now here I am, not on a mountaintop in Guatemala but back at the keyboard in my study, and I'm listening to his story again, but this time I can stop it, rewind, and repeat. So let's play the game now, let's take up the question after all this time and ask him, "Why?" (and "Why?"), and take down his answer:

Because, truly,
Eve and Adam
were crucified in the world, Eve and Adam.
He was the first man who married.

Crucified? Eve and Adam were "crucified"? Here's a word don Mateo got from Spanish, one of "our" languages, from "our" side of the Atlantic. Does he mean to be using *crear* here, "create," instead of *crucificar*, or is he folding the New Testament back over on top of the Old? He's not far off if we consider that Christ is sometimes called "the second Adam," and certainly what happened to Adam was cruel. What happened to Eve was cruel too, though it's doubly hard to think her onto a cross. But all right. "Truly," he says, he wants us to take him at his word, he's not just making this up.

So we're about to hear the story of Adam and Eve, as told by don Mateo on the day Eight Bird on top of the mountain called Thunderer. Or rather the story of "Eve and

Adam," he's reversed the order twice already, there's no mistake about it, and perhaps the twist in his version will involve more than folding the New back onto the Old—though people who speak his language nearly always put "her" first when talking about "him and her," or rather "her and him." But don Mateo is doing this to a pair of names that've always been spoken the other way around, all the way back to the Hebrew.

What, then, is the question before us? It would seem to have something to do with our condition as human beings. We're all descended from Eve and Adam, we are the way we are because they "were crucified in the world." And, don Mateo tells us, Adam "was the first man who married." So the question would also concern why we're still here today, after all this time. Here follows a lot of noise on the tape, but in the midst of the zaps and rumbles some words can be made out:

==**!!◆◆≈!!!!
 ◆ano◆ther◆ th◆i◆ng that ≈de≈fea◆ted ≈us
 was a de≈vi≈l
 who was ◆ca◆lled the Ser◆pent.

Right here I hear myself on the tape, saying, "The Serpent?" Maybe I'm hoping it'll turn out to be a New World serpent, the Plumed Serpent even, and not just that wretched serpent in the Garden. Don Mateo simply says "Yes," it's a serpent, and the noise comes up again, we've only this hint to the turn of the plot that hasn't even got started yet, but no matter. People who live in these mountains are always folding stories back on themselves. Whatever it was we missed, we'll be able to pick up on it later. When the tape is clear again we're in the midst of the next scene:

Well.
 Then, yes
 after that
 the Lord Jesus Christ said,

and now don Mateo gives the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ a magisterial tone,

"So.
 Now—
 let their sin begin."
 Because they hadn't known how to sin,
 Eve and Adam.
 They were already adults, but they didn't know how to sin.
 So he said,
 "Let their sin begin."

Here He is, the Lord Jesus Christ, already on the scene way back when. It's beginning to sound as though Adam, or even Eve and Adam, will be in the role of the second Christ. And the Lord isn't saying, "Let there be light," or "Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind." He's saying, "Let their sin begin." Whatever the Serpent may

have done under the cover of those zaps and rumbles, sin doesn't come into the world until the Lord gives his say-so. And it's the practice of sin that matters, not the concept. Eve and Adam don't even know *how* to sin until Jesus says, "Let their sin begin." The Word is made flesh.

At this point don Mateo expects to hear something from us, he's beginning to wonder about us, about whether we understand what "sin" is. He turns to us, speaks to us gringos in the same tone of voice he'd use if he were getting impatient with his children:

You're still a little young.
But not me.

Then he gets right back into his story, he asks a question about the beginning of sin and doesn't wait for us to volunteer an answer:

But why?
In order to make the world **abound**.

► ► ►

Here he pauses longer than usual, about two seconds—that's a long time in the middle of a story—to let his answer sink in. In case we were still wondering what kind of sin it was the Lord Jesus was speaking into existence, it's the kind that makes the world **abound**. Now don Mateo repeats the same words (and the same pause), but shifts his emphasis:

In order to make the **world** abound.

► ► ►

Then he offers an interpretation, he opens the breach between text and interpretation in the midst of his own words:

So there would be more people,
there would be more
Christians.

He uses the word *cristianos* in the same way Spaniards used it when they came here from out of the Middle Ages; it's synonymous with "people." And as far as that goes, he's been baptized and so have his wife and children and many previous generations, and the same goes for the three ethnographers who happen to be with him today. Except that he and his forebears have never seen any contradiction between sprinkling water on babies and giving drinks of strong liquor to stones. By this time the three ethnographers don't see any contradiction either, or at least not today they don't.

Now we're ready to get back to the story, to find out what happened between Eve and Adam. Don Mateo starts out on a long high pitch, as if he were just able to bear a pain from somewhere inside him, then comes back to words again:

Eeeeeeee Eve

began to cry.

▶ ▶ ▶

Because for Eve

it was just a little difficult.

▶ ▶ ▶

So Eve's part in making the world abound is painful, just as it is in the Old World Book.
And why is it difficult for her?

Because females

are hard

and they are

somewhat physical,

I mean.

So it's not because she's being punished for something she did, but because it's in the very being of women to be more of this world than men. Women know this through their pain, the pain that makes Eve cry, but they are "hard" in the face of this pain. When don Mateo says, "somewhat physical, I mean," the tape has the sound of my voice, I'm letting go of a chuckle, perhaps a laugh of recognition at hearing a notion that sounds like one of our own. But a laugh from his audience is not what he's looking for, he turns to me to affirm what he just said, in a gentle tone but with a dip in his pitch that bears a hint of annoyance:

Ye_eeeees—

and suddenly he narrows his eyes and sharpens his voice:

I'm telling you the **truth**.

It's because I'm older

that I'm speaking to you about this question.

At this point doña Bárbara concedes him the point with "Yes." He drops his sharp tone but he's not through defending his authority against my chuckle:

And also

you've already seen my sacred book?

You've done that already.

All right, then.

Mm hm.

So we're not getting the story of Eve and Adam by word of mouth alone, he has a book. He's made this move before, and the authors of the alphabetic version of the *Popol Vuh* made a similar move four centuries ago, saying their work was based on a prior book in "the ancient writing." Don Mateo keeps his book on his altar at home, hidden behind the

parapet of the tabernacle that holds an image of the most mystical of the Twelve Apostles, right next to the crystal that brings him dreams.

Somewhere, someone in these mountains probably has another manuscript of the *Popol Vuh* tucked away somewhere, or maybe even a version in hieroglyphs. Or better yet, a hieroglyphic book with alphabetic notes crammed into the white spaces, an inter-linear translation into Spanish, made long ago and lost from view until who knows when. Haven't we all been waiting for the weighty Book that could bear the name Rosetta?

The book don Mateo has at home is octavo, thin, stapled along the fold line, and battered. The color-lithograph illustrations are of Bible scenes and the text is a retelling of Bible stories, in Spanish—the sort of thing that's handed out in Sunday school. But a book it is, and it stands for The Book. Don Mateo never thinks of rereading it. It's there for the fact of it, there to have its existence revealed to those who need to know of its existence. And when he's away from home it's for citing, and now that he's cited it he takes a good bite from a tortilla and gets back to his story:

Then
Adam said to her,

and here he speaks as if to someone farther away than any of us,

"You, Eve:
▶▶▶
you have to make a shirt.
You have to make some
pants, you have to make everything.
And
with cotton."
"And you, Adam:
you have to work."

As Eve continues her speech don Mateo picks up the stick he's been using to stir the incense and begins to whack a stone with it. Life is going to get just as hard in his story as it got outside the gates of the Old World Eden:

"With a pWHACKickaxe,
withWHACK a machete," WHACK
wwHACKith cvWHACKerythWHACKing that
thWHACKat WHACK WHACK
that we have here in the world. WHACK WHACK

So Eve and Adam tell each other what their respective lots will be, they're making a contract, it's not just coming down from on high. And come to think of it, in "our" version of the story Eve isn't even given work to do, unless it's in that line that goes, "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children," or hidden in the line about Adam that goes, "He shall rule over thee."

Now don Mateo gets in one last whack:

For this reason we're here
in the world
physically
working. WHACK
And why?
Because God
told us.

Here is physicality again, as with Eve's "Eeeeeeeee," and work is one of the things that comes along with it. And it seems that God is behind this matter of work after all, despite that conversation between Eve and Adam. But at least they did have a conversation and they both have their work.

The next six lines, up there on the mountain that day, went by very fast. We can't ask the tape machine to answer questions, but this time around we can at least catch the words:

Because Evenadam
were a god
equal to Jesus Christ.
They are the first
humans who
are in the world.

▶ ▶ ▶

So "they *are* the first humans" and "*are* in the world," but they "*were* a god." They (and we) are now working, but weren't before. And why are we working? "Because God told us." Why did he do this to us? "Because Evenadam were a god."

Let's try this one a little slower. "Eve and Adam" sound like "Evenadam," *Eva-yadán*, don Mateo runs the words together as one. But then he says they "were," making them plural again, and next he says they were "a god," making them one again. It's like those pairs of gods in the *Popol Vuh*, the New World Book, where we're never quite sure whether we're dealing with two gods or one, unless the two halves of a pair start talking to one another. And it's like Jaguar Many Trees, the first of all human beings, who's a "motherfather" all by ^{her} himself before White Sea Turtle becomes his wife. Of course there's something androgynous about the Adam of the Old World Book too, whose name simply means "human" in Hebrew, and part of the very substance of this human became the substance of Eve—a "rib" or (as it could've been translated) a "side." Eve as the "other side" of a not-yet-divided human.

The way don Mateo tells the story, Eve and Adam were, or the god Evenadam was, "equal to Jesus Christ," but when Jesus Christ said, "Let their sin begin," and when they went to work in the world, they became mere humans, and that's why we're all here. If we ever had any potential for rivaling the gods, Jesus Christ took care of that by weighing down our very existence with physicality and by making sure there would be any num-

ber of us. We were a problem to the gods of the New World Book, too, when one of them warned the others about us by saying, "They'll become as great as gods, unless they procreate, unless they proliferate." And the Lord God of the Old World Book said, "Behold, the man is become as one of us," whatever he may have meant by "us" (and whoever he may have been talking to), just before he gave Adam and Eve the news about giving birth and tilling the ground.

Now, with the former Evenadam firmly established as the Eve and Adam of this world, with all their physicality, don Mateo is ready to move on, right past the next nine months at least:

And then
later
then, after this,
they had a son
who was called
who was called
Pastor.

▶ ▶ ▶

And then they had another son who was called
who was called—
I have it in a book there,
I'm going to show you there,

and here doña Bárbara and don Dionísio both say "Yes," we're humoring him, here he goes with his book again,

I'll show you.

And doña Bárbara adds, "At home," yes, his book is at home. No one offers him any help with names, even though all three of us gringos know Cain and Abel. We let it go when he says Pastor instead of Cain, and never mind that the firstborn son of Adam and Eve was not a pastor. We keep Abel to ourselves as well, even when he comes right out and asks us for the name of the second son:

Then
who was called
▶ ▶ ▶
what was this son called?

After all, we're ethnographers, not missionaries. We want to hear what don Mateo might say, what a Quiché Indian might say, without any prompting from us. What he might say if we weren't even here, never mind that plenty of other people from the Old World got here before us. So he gives up on naming the second son of Eve and Adam and goes on:

Then—
this Pastor
▶ ▶ ▶

is more, is more—
I don't know
why
but what I'm trying to say is that
he's physical.

So Pastor is more "physical" than his younger brother, just as Eve is more "physical" than Adam. Eve's physicality is evidenced in her hardness, her endurance of the pain that comes with childbirth. How, then, do we know that Pastor is "physical"?

Because he killed his brother.

Is don Mateo merely saying that giving birth to a child and killing a man are both grossly physical acts, or could there be something more to it than that? For the glimmer of an answer we have to look over to the west in Mexico and back to the time before Europeans arrived, where women who died in childbirth and men who died in battle were sent off to share the same celestial paradise, while people who died from other causes were sent off to earthly worlds beneath the land of the living. Don Mateo's story seems in harmony with this scheme of things, but it concerns a woman who gives birth *without* dying and a man who kills without *being* killed. Instead of going off to a celestial paradise, these two survivors have an even greater burden of physicality than other earthly beings.

When doña Bárbara heard that Pastor "killed his brother" she said "Oh," perhaps startled at the way don Mateo was giving away the main event in a story whose characters he'd barely introduced. Now, having heard her "Oh," he goes back and repeats his previous words, but with emphasis added:

He killed his **brother**.

Now don Mal-cum interjects, "Wasn't it in the milpa?" which is to say in a garden of maize, squash, and beans. For the first time, one of the three ethnographers reveals that he might already know something about the story. After all, don Mateo has already given the killing away, and didn't Cain kill Abel in a field of grain? And wouldn't don Mateo interpret that field as a milpa? Or mightn't missionaries have told him it was a milpa, devising a small lie in the service of their Big Truth? Don Mateo answers aside with a quick "Yes," seeming to accept what don Mal-cum has ventured, but he doesn't let it change his course—he goes right on describing Pastor, the man who will kill his brother once the story gets told:

It seems
he had a lot of livestock.
Those of a single color
are his brother's.
And those of two colors

belong to Pastor,
he was a pastor.

So we're not dealing with Cain the gardener and Abel the herder. Rather, both brothers own livestock. But where does don Mateo get this division of livestock by color? To find that we'll have to read ahead, twenty-six chapters and twenty generations beyond the story of Cain and Abel: "And he removed that day the he goats that were ringstraked and spotted, and all the she goats that were specked and spotted." It was Jacob who did that, separating his own animals from Laban's according to a bargain they had struck, and Jacob did indeed end up, as don Mateo has it, with "a lot of livestock." But Laban was Jacob's maternal uncle and father-in-law, not his brother. Jacob had a brother all right, the twin who was born from Rebekah just ahead of him: Esau, the hunter. But it was Esau who thought of killing Jacob, not the other way around. So it would seem that don Mateo has put a prosperous Abel into the body of a homicidal Cain and a prosperous Jacob into the body of a homicidal Esau, and then called them all Pastor. No wonder he can't seem to find a name for the other brother.

And then—
after that—
they talked.
And since young were born from those of two colors, only from
those of two colors,
then
only the
only Pastor had
animals,
cows and bulls and however many things.
And
this what's-his-name
he didn't have anything, because

now don Mal-cum interrupts, he's trying to be helpful again but his timing is bad. In saying "what's-his-name" here, don Mateo wasn't really asking for an answer, nor did he leave a big enough pause for one. But between "because" and whatever he meant to say after it, don Mal-cum inserts "Abel," which may or may not be a logical name for Pastor's brother. No matter; don Mateo doesn't pick up on it anyway. He says "Eh?" aside and then, without waiting for don Mal-cum to repeat the name (and without finishing whatever was hanging on "because"), he reasserts his claim to be telling a story. He makes the most basic of all narrative moves, saying,

Then

and again don Mal-cum interrupts. Having once decided to intervene, he wants his intervention to make a difference. Now he offers information about Abel, translated the way a

missionary might translate it, saying, "He was a milpero," a gardener who planted maize, squash, and beans. He's so caught up in don Mateo's story he's forgotten that if anybody was a milpero in the Old World Book, it was Cain and not Abel. As for don Mateo, he goes ahead with the new sentence whose space he staked out with "Then":

he said,

and here follows a conversation between Pastor's younger brother what's-his-name and someone else. It's a secret conversation, and don Mateo goes into it so deeply that he almost keeps it secret from the rest of us. He partly whispers, partly mutters with a tight-mouthed meanness. This could almost be an internal dialogue on the part of what's-his-name, or even an internal dialogue on the part of don Mateo. It's almost as hard to follow as that earlier part of the tape where nothing but the words "devil" and "serpent" came through, and the next thing we knew the Lord Jesus Christ was saying, "Let their sin begin." The only intelligible words are these, in which someone is trying to turn what's-his-name against Pastor:

"This, this [redacted]
[redacted] is screwing you.
Because [redacted] this is why
all [redacted] they are all
all of two colors,
all spotted and all—"
▶ ▶ ▶

Once again we miss out on what the "because" might be, why it is that Pastor, who has the right to all the animals of two colors, ends up with a lot of livestock and what's-his-name doesn't have anything. If Pastor was like Joseph of the Old World Book, he must've used sorcery.

At this point don Mateo leaves off quoting and switches to the double voice of indirect discourse, speaking as narrator and yet staying with what's-his-names's point of view:

Then none of them came out black, none of them came out
none
dark, none came out—
these—
▶ ▶ ▶

he breaks off as his children move in close and want something to nibble on, then shifts from the narrative to the interpretive mode long enough to tell us that even this part of the story is an origin story:

Because of this
cows remain distinct,

yes, in distinct classes.
There are
white, there are black, there are
roan, and there are all of them
because of this
this matter.

► ► ►

Twice he stretches the sound of the verb "are," as if to include all the colors he doesn't mention by name.

Now what's-his-name ends his secret dialogue with whoever-it-is has been telling him he's been getting screwed. He's made a decision:

"Well,
by Jesus,
I'm going,"
he went to, to Pastor,
he was thinking of fighting
with his brother.

Yes, the younger brother is thinking of fighting with the elder, ^{Jacob} Abel is on the move against ^{Esau} Cain. But one thing hasn't changed: the prosperous brother is the one who's in danger, in which case ^{Esau} Cain is on the move against ^{Jacob} Abel. Either way, Pastor is in physical danger, so he is like a woman in labor or a man in battle. But before don Mateo gets around to letting what's-his-name confront Pastor, he feels the need to claim authority for his story again—only this time, instead of citing a book, the book he has at home, he cites something older and deeper than that:

This is the Ancient Word.
Because
the Ancient Word is, is about Pastor and the
other son of Adam.

Back in the time when the New World Book had its first confrontation with the Old World Book, don Mateo's ancestors called the speech that came out of reading their own book the *Ojer Tzij*, the "Ancient" or "Prior Word," and they called the speech that came out of the invaders' book *uch'ab'al Dios*, or "God talk." After four hundred years of preaching, the story of Pastor and the other son of Adam, if not quite the story of Cain and Abel, nor quite the story of Esau (or Laban) and Jacob, has come to qualify as part of the Ancient Word. Or else the Ancient Word has taken those stories unto itself. Either way, two brothers are about to have it out:

Then—
they went off
since they always went to round up the
the animals.

Now Pastor's nameless brother begins to make trouble, saying,

"What is this?
I'm going
▶ ▶ ▶
I'm going to count the animals.
I'm going to count the **animals**.
And I don't have any more than before.
Only one, two, three.
Well, one
is pure black.
Another is pure, pure
pure—"
what's it called?
Another color that's not pure black, it's not pure
white, it's pure—
mm.

Again the three ethnographers refuse to come to the rescue; they won't even risk putting the name of a color in don Mateo's mouth. He closes the matter with "mm" and moves back to the angry words of Pastor's brother:

Then,
▶ ▶ ▶
"You've been screwing around with me, you have more," he says.

This last line is hard to make out from the tape, and the problem is about to get worse. Again don Mateo goes too far inside his story for the rest of us to follow. He's thinking his characters through rather than acting them out. For Pastor's reply he uses such a tense, low, close-mouthed voice that only the fact of denial comes through:

"No.
No, [REDACTED]."

Whatever may have happened beyond an exchange of words, don Mateo is content to tell us, in a single line we've already heard anyway, what prosperous Pastor did to end the argument started by his jealous brother—and then we're off on a new episode:

He killed his brother.
Then, after that—

the next thing we know, we're hearing (or trying to hear) what will turn out to be the words of Adam, as he breaks the news of Pastor's deed to Jesus Christ:

"My Lord,
[REDACTED] these words."

Then, after that he said—

"He killed his brother."

► ► ►

After that pause, don Mateo goes back to filling in something he should have told us before he got to the words of Adam:

And when he killed his brother
the blood
of the brother
wasn't
wasn't accepted by the Holy World.
The Holy World didn't accept it.
Because
he hadn't talked with the World.

The three ethnographers prick up their ears, they're always listening for twists that would move a story like this one a little farther from the Old World and closer to the New. On the tape doña Bárbara can be heard saying "Aha." *Aha*, it begins to sound as though Pastor *sacrificed* his brother. But when he did, the blood wasn't accepted by the Holy World, Holy Earth. Pastor didn't talk with the earth, he didn't have the words to make the sacrifice acceptable. Except for his name and his cattle, he could be a character out of the New World Book. The gods of that book would have wanted him to be their "provider, nurturer," but there was something even more important for them than sacrifice. As they put it, "Our recompense is in words."

Even in the Old World Book, the problem with the spilling of Abel's blood isn't limited to the fact of the fratricide. God says to Cain, "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth out from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand." So the earth is almost a character in the story, at least for this brief moment. She "opened her mouth" to receive Abel's blood, but she didn't accept it as a proper offering—or else it was God who didn't accept it, that jealous God who wanted to cut off any possibility of offerings to the earth.

Now we're ready to hear what Adam has to say about Pastor, whose blood offering wasn't accepted by the Holy World:

Then
he said,
Adam did,
"Jesus Christ,"
he said,
"Now then:

and here Adam speaks with sharp pain:

What am I going to **do** with my **son**?
Because for me

it hurts me a lot, because
because my son
is burning
the blood
only for the Holy World.
He's burning it only for the Holy World
who doesn't accept
the cursed World doesn't accept it."

► ► ►

So Pastor has been *burning* the blood. Don Mateo has combined the spilling of the blood with the idea of a burnt offering. Shades of Abraham, only this Abraham has gone up on the mountain to sacrifice not his son but his brother, and he's gone through with it. But the fact that Pastor's burnt offering consists of blood makes sense right here on this mountain where the story is being told, on the day Eight Bird. The copal that still smolders on the hearth before us was made from the sap of trees, and sap is *kik'* in the Quiché language, the *kik'* means "blood." We are burning blood right here. Not only that, but the New World Book tells us that the first piece of incense *ever* burned was a substitute for the heart and blood of a sacrifice.

But Adam thinks Pastor shouldn't be burning blood for the World, since "the cursed World doesn't accept it." But he's about to be told he's wrong:

After that he said to him,
Jesus Christ did, "No.
The World
is not cursed:
what it is, is sacred."

Jesus, of all people (or gods), comes to the defense of the World, becomes the Saviour of the World in a new sense, declaring the World itself, the earth in all its materiality, to be sacred. Again the three ethnographers pay close attention; they are members of a generation of gringos who worry about the way their society seems bent on the destruction of the earth, the biosphere itself. The problem seems to go back at least as far as the Old World Book, where God tells man to "subdue" the earth and gives him "dominion" over it, which spells disaster for the earth—and then, in no time at all, the disaster becomes mutual. Adam is told, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake," and just one chapter later Cain is told, "Now art thou cursed from the earth." But don Mateo's Ancient Word has Jesus calling the earth "sacred," and the moment she hears it doña Bárbara says "Yes." Don Mateo acknowledges her response by repeating the words of Jesus:

"The World
is not **cursed**.
What it is, is **sacred**,"
► ► ►
says Jesus Christ.

This time he gives "cursed" and "sacred" more punch, emphasizing the difference between them, but he makes no change in the words themselves, nor in their timing. Here's a bit of fixed text in the midst of improvisation. Indeed, the original words constitute a rhymed Spanish couplet: *El Mundo no es condenado; lo que es, es sagrado*. This is the kind of statement motherfathers like to make when they argue with members of the Catholic Action movement, which aims to remove the stains of paganism from people like don Mateo and make them into *real* Catholics. Converts to the movement memorize their arguments in catechism classes; meanwhile, people who burn copal to the Holy World have been developing a countercatechism. Catechists question the worship of the World, just as Adam is doing here, and counter-catechists try to straighten them out with pro-World statements like the catchy couplet used by Jesus, *El Mundo no es condenado; lo que es, es sagrado*. But Adam resists:

"Mm hm.
That's all very well," he said.
"But what I say is,
it is cursed.
What's to be done?" he said.

▶ ▶ ▶

"You have only to clean it, and then it isn't cursed,
this World."

So Adam and Pastor have some cleaning to do before the World will accept Pastor's offering. The kind of cleaning Jesus is talking about is partly done by prayer. When burning offerings one should always say, even before striking a match, "Make my guilt vanish." If it weren't possible for one's guilt to disappear, at least for as long as it took to present offerings down by a spring or up on a mountain, then it wouldn't be possible to set foot in a holy place without profaning it. But there is another kind of cleaning, "the washing of the plate and cup," the sweeping out of ashes from the earth and stones of the shrine itself. What vanishes then are the wrongs that may have been done during the very act of making prayers and offerings. Perhaps someone asked that illness enter the body of a neighbor, or perhaps the perfectly good words someone spoke aloud in prayer were mingled with the words of an inner voice that couldn't let go of some resentment. Pastor's own brother might've been thinking about the uneven division of livestock while he prayed at the very shrine where his own blood was destined to be burned. If so, that could be the root of the curse that prevents the World from accepting the blood.

In any case, having told Adam that a cleaning will set things right, Jesus goes on talking about the Holy World:

"Because
you must go with him," he said.

▶ ▶ ▶

"Walk with him,
talk with him—"

and with these words, don Mateo has made his pro-World Jesus stand the cryptocatechist Adam on his head. "Go with him," or "*Vaya con Él*"—"Him" with a capital H—these are the words used by Catholic catechists and Protestant evangelists only with reference to the Lord Jesus, and here Jesus Himself goes right ahead and uses them with reference to the Holy World. And as if that weren't enough, He goes on to paraphrase a hymn about Himself, the one whose English version goes, "He walks with me / and He talks with me." Don Mateo has accomplished a conversion, the conversion of the archconverter Himself, who, in His turn sets Adam back on the right track, here on the face of the Holy World.

Now there's lots more tape to play—it's a long story—but there's no more time. So I'll fast-forward to the last sounds of the day Eight Bird, recorded while the three Quichés and the three ethnographers were getting up to leave. Someone is whistling, it's one of the ethnographers, and—what's this? It's a Bach recessional.

Notes

Portions or earlier versions of this text were presented to the Department of Religion at McMaster University, the Department of English at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and the Latin American Studies programs at Brown University and Emory University. The narrative portion is from a larger work in progress, *Breath on the Mirror*.

1. For a fuller development of these arguments, see Tedlock (1990).
2. By writing "in the strictest sense" I mean a graphic system with signs that correspond to the sounds of a language, independently of the words those sounds may occur in. It is now well established that the ancient Maya script included not only logographs (signs for particular words) but a complete inventory of signs for syllables as well; for a concise and up-to-date introduction to the script, see Lounsbury (1989).
3. In the story, short pauses (one second or a little less) are indicated by line changes and longer pauses (a second and a half to two seconds) by arrows. A complete intonational contour, ended by a steep drop in pitch, is marked by a period, and a shallower drop by a comma. At the end of a line a lack of punctuation indicates that a contour is broken off, while a dash indicates an emphatic incompleteness, marked by a deliberate rise. Boldface type calls for a relatively loud voice, and small type calls for a soft voice. Spaced-out words should be pronounced slowly and precisely.

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